# MY QUEEN

A WEEKLY JOURNAL FOR YOUNG WOMEN

No. 10.

PRICE, FIVE CENTS.


# MARION MARLOWE'S TRIUMPH

OR

## IN SPITE OF HER ENEMIES

BY GRACE SHIRLEY


PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY STREET & SMITH, 238 William Street, New York City.



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*Entered at New York Post-Office as Second-Class Matter.*

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Issued Weekly. By Subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.
Entered According to Act of Congress in the year 1900, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C.

No. 10. NEW YORK, December 1, 1900. Price Five Cents.

# Marion Marlowe's Triumph;

OR,

## IN SPITE OF HER ENEMIES.

By GRACE SHIRLEY.

### CHAPTER I.

A "PROFESSIONAL" BOARDING HOUSE.

"Miss Marlowe, is that you? Well, for goodness' sake, come here! Is that a French restaurant or beer garden, or just an every-day menagerie?"

It was nearly midnight, and Mrs. Denison, the proprietor of a "first-class" boarding house, was standing with her hand on the door of her second floor front room, gazing into the apartment with a bewildered look on her honest features. A beautiful young girl, in street attire, was just coming through the hall, and at the woman's call she stopped abruptly beside her.

"It looks more like an aquarium!" she exclaimed, as she, too, peered through the door. "Mercy! how awful! Why, some of the creatures are alive! Shut the door, quick—do, Mrs. Denison!"

But Mrs. Denison's temper was rising now, and she determined to face what she saw before her.

She threw the door open wide, and with a vigorous movement lifted a small creature on the toe of her shoe and sent it spinning to the other end of the apartment.

"Hard-shelled crabs, and alive, as true as you live!" she exclaimed, disgusted. "And there's a lobster broiling on the stove, with my gas to cook it, and not a word said about such doings when I ask for extras!"

"There's a box of herrings on the table and some crackers," said the young girl, as she glanced around; "and, oh, what a lot of beer! Any one would think they were all topers!"

"Lushes is the word," corrected the landlady, grimly. "They call each other that—I've often heard them!"

"Ouch! Look out, Mrs. Denison! He is after you!" shrieked the girl, as another vici-

ous-looking crab came ambling sideways from a corner.

Mrs. Denison turned off the gas with a determined hand, then, lifting her skirts carefully, she picked her way out of the apartment.

Miss Marlowe had fled to the hall the moment she saw her landlady reach for the gas. She had no desire to be caught in the dark with any such creatures.

"Well, if I ever regretted anything in my life, it is this!" snapped the landlady, as she closed the door behind them. "To think that I was ever tempted to take theatrical people into my house, or 'professionals,' as they choose to call themselves! Why, they've only been here a week, and just see what they've done already! They've turned my house into a perfect bedlam with their riotous orgies!"

"Can't you get rid of them, madam?" asked the young girl, as she started slowly up the stairs. "Why, it won't be long before they ruin your furniture."

"If they don't bring the roof down on my head, I shall be lucky," said the woman, angrily; and just then there came a wild shriek from the back room on the floor above them.

"So that's where they are—in Miss Stanley's room," she said, quickly; "and to think that they've left their critters loose and their lobster a broilin'!"

"Villain! I defy thee! Thine hour is come!" came floating in hollow tones down the stairs. Then a voice like a trumpet blast uttered the death howl of the villain. Marion Marlowe laughed—she could not help it. She had found these theatrical folks annoying at times, but there were other times when they were really amusing.

They came in at all hours and woke her up, and the odors from their rooms were not always pleasant. Still, with all this hubbub and racket, they were usually good natured, and over and over again they had asked her to join them. Still, she could not help feeling sorry for Mrs. Denison, just the same, and she half anticipated Mrs. Denison's explanation.

"I had to take 'em," she said, sorrowfully. "Times are awfully dull, and I was gettin' behind in my expenses. You see, I have three big houses here, and I'd soon go to the wall if my rooms were empty."

"Well, they are anything but empty now," burst out Marion, merrily. "You've got more boarders than you bargained for, just at present, Mrs. Denison!"

"Ugh! the horrible critters!" said Mrs. Denison, with a shudder. "And to think they are meandering all over my carpet!"

She started down the stairs, while Marion began her climb to the fourth floor, where she was occupying a large hall bedroom.

For the young country girl had left the Hotel Rosedale, where she had been living, in the hope that a quiet boarding house would suit her better. And it had been very quiet at Mrs. Denison's the first week of her stay; for, as the lady said, half her rooms were empty, but for the last week pandemonium itself had been outdone, for the place had suddenly been transformed into a "professional" boarding house.

Marion had been to the theatre that evening with her friends, Miss Alma Allyn and Dr. Reginald Brookes, and had returned just in time to witness her landlady's consternation.

It was very funny, that scene in the second floor front room, if one could only look at it from a disinterested standpoint, for the crabs were comical as they sidled about over the brussels carpet, and the lobster looked appetizing in spite of the fact that it stood a fair chance of burning to a crisp.

Marion was smiling to herself, although she sympathized with the landlady. It was a pity, she thought, that a hard-working

woman like Mrs. Denison should be so badly treated.

Just as she reached the top of the stairs the door of the back room flew open, disclosing a blaze of light that almost dazzled her as she passed it.

A young man dashed out clad in a most extraordinary costume, including a pair of white duck trousers, surmounted by a gorgeous Roman toga and a fool's cap and bells perched jauntily upon his disgustingly long tresses.

"Ah! thy pardon, fair maid!" he exclaimed, tragically, as he saw Marion. Then the fool's cap was doffed and he salaamed before her.

The young girl smiled, both at his costume and at his words, but there was just a tinge of disgust in her tones as she answered his apology.

"Good-evening, Mr. Gordon. You need not apologize. I have been told that you actors claim immunity from the proprieties."

"Not so, I assure you! We are most proper," was the reply; "only it is our way to be frolicsome, especially after the performance."

"Is that what you call it?" asked Marion, with a smile. "Well, you certainly are kiddish, so why shouldn't you frolic."

Ed Gordon's theatrical air was laid aside in an instant, and as he stared hard at the young girl his handsome face reddened slightly.

"You dislike the profession, Miss Marlowe!" he said, slowly. "Our fun disgusts you! You are too dignified to enjoy it!"

Marion knew that a dozen ears were strained for her reply, for the door behind her was still standing wide open.

"I like most kinds of fun," she said, very slowly, "but I do detest that form of amusement which is inconsiderate of other people. One should be just even in fun, I think, Mr. Gordon."

"And we make too much noise, you mean, Miss Marlowe!" said the young man, quickly.

Before Marion could answer a woman rushed out into the hall.

"What nonsense!" she cried, angrily. "If we annoy Miss Marlowe, why doesn't she go away? This is a professional house now, and we pay for our privileges!"

Marion turned and looked at her, but did not speak.

"Miss Marlowe is right—we are inconsiderate," said Mr. Gordon, gravely.

Marion thanked him with her eyes, and passed on up the stairs.

The woman dashed back into the room with an angry retort. Then the door slammed, and Marion knew that the handsome actor had followed her.

One or two angry remarks passed, and then the voices became subdued. It was evident that the party in Miss Stanley's room was having a vigorous discussion.

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## CHAPTER II.

### A PLAN FOR REVENGE.

Marion heard their remarks to each other, but she went on without heeding them.

When she reached her room she closed the door behind her, but, although it was after midnight, she did not think of retiring.

"No use trying to sleep until they are quiet," she said to herself; "and probably they'll make more noise than ever just because I said what I did. Perhaps it would have been wiser to have paid no attention."

She disrobed leisurely and made herself comfortable for the night, and after a while she quite forgot the little unpleasantness in the hall, for her mind was filled with recollections of the play she had witnessed that evening.

"Oh, I should just love to be an actress," she murmured to herself; "not a mediocre actress like those people down stairs, but a great star like Duse, Bernhardt or even Modjeska!"

As she spoke she raised her eyes to her little glass, and the reflection that came back to her astonished her a little.

The great gray eyes were luminous as stars, her cheeks were glowing with a brilliant hue, and between the parted lips her white teeth gleamed like polished ivory.

She could not help seeing how beautiful she was, yet this fact did not increase her vanity by so much as a fraction.

"Oh, well, I will be on the stage some time, I hope," she said, with a sigh. "Madame Leopold is training me as fast as she can, and Mr. Everett, the musical critic, will help me, too. But, oh dear, I seem to have a new ambition to-night! I want to be an actress as well as a singer."

She smiled a little as she prepared for bed, then, almost from force of habit, she stopped and listened.

Much to her surprise, things down stairs grew suddenly quiet. Two or three doors slammed loudly, but after that there was very little disturbance.

The young girl was soon in bed, sleeping the sleep of health. But the other boarders were not all sleeping, although they were unusually quiet, and in one room, at least, three people were busily talking.

Miss Villette had gone back to her crabs and lobsters, and was very much annoyed to find her room in darkness. Her friends, Nona Nelson, a soubrette, and Hugh Dean, the comedian of the company, were with her, but in spite of their disappointment at the interrupted banquet they were inclined to be unusually silent.

"The mean old thing! She's been in here and turned my gas off!" said Miss Villette, under her breath, as she opened the door. It was not necessary for her to explain whom she meant, for it had not taken a week to discover the one of their landlady's habits.

"Lock your door next time you go out," said Nona, quickly.

She was a pert-looking blonde, with a sallow skin, and at present she was arrayed in a Japanese kimona that fairly blossomed with one-legged birds and sunflowers.

"Or else read the riot act to the old dame," said Dean. "These boarding-house keepers are as mean as misers."

"I wouldn't be surprised if that Miss Marlowe put her up to it! She's a treacherous little minx, if I'm not mistaken."

Miss Villette was relighting the gas as she spoke, and soon had her lobster sizzling merrily.

"Wow! Jerusalem! Vera! have I got 'em again! Why the mischief didn't you tell me there was a lot of those beasts loose on the premises!"

Hugh Dean had uttered a sudden yell, and at the same time had made a jump for a table.

"Oh, there's only six of 'em! They won't hurt you," said Vera, laughing. "I'll corral them in a minute, as soon as the water boils. Oh, I'm a dandy at crabbing on dry land, Hughey!"

"You are a dandy at anything," was Dean's admiring answer.

"Ed Gordon don't think so," spoke up the soubrette, who was never averse to tormenting the *ingenue*.

"Pooh! Who cares for Ed Gordon, anyway!" said Miss Villette, loftily, as she made a dash for the first crab and bounced him into the boiling water.

"Well, you do, for one," was Nona Nelson's answer. "You're dead in love with him and you know it, else why would you be jealous?"

"But I'm not, I tell you," said the woman, fiercely. "I just want you to understand that I'm in love with no man. If I was I would put up with no nonsense, I can tell you! If I

caught my lover flirting, I'd find a way to end it!"

"I guess you would," said Hugh Dean, eyeing her. "You'd be a dangerous woman to fall in love with, Vera."

Vera Villette said nothing, but her black eyes snapped ominously. She was a woman of twenty-five, medium height, and with the dark skin and raven hair that spoke of Spanish origin.

Nona Nelson had poured some beer from a monstrous pitcher, and in a very few moments they were eating and drinking, but without the usual hilarity that had accompanied these repasts.

Something had happened to make them all feel gloomy and depressed, and after a few minutes Nona Nelson let out the secret.

"I always thought Ed Gordon was daft!" she said, spitefully; "but to think of his saying what he did to-night—that not one of us could compare with the 'beautiful Miss Marlowe.'"

"He's a fool to say it, even if he thought so," said Hugh Dean, laughing. "I wouldn't take the chances on such a remark for a hundred dollars!"

"And before Vera, too," went on Nona, angrily. "Why, it was a downright insult, and I'd resent it, I tell you."

"You let me alone; I'll get square with him," hissed Vera. "It isn't the only grudge I have against him, and yet, you little simpleton, you say that I love him."

"I really and truly believe you do," said the soubrette, staring straight at her: "only you Spaniards have a queer way of showing your love. If your sweetheart offends you, you stab him, or something."

Vera Villette smiled grimly, but it lit up her dark face wonderfully. She had dazzling white teeth, and her lips were as red as cherries.

"We do not take kindly to neglect or indifference in our lovers," she said, dryly; "but we don't always confine ourselves to punishing them. Sometimes we wreak our vengeance on the object of our hatred."

Her guests both looked at her in astonishment now. She was showing them a fresh side of her deep, subtle nature.

"You wouldn't hurt her—that girl upstairs, would you?" whispered Nona.

"Why, she's only a child, and from the country at that! Take a man of your size," urged Hugh Dean, soberly. "Why, I'd as soon wrong a baby as that pretty Miss Marlowe!"

"What! Have you, too, fallen a victim to her charms?" sneered Vera, quickly.

Nona Nelson said nothing, but her eyes were flashing. There was a red flush on each cheek, but poor Dean did not notice it.

"I think she's as pretty as a picture, if that is what you mean," said Hugh, recklessly; "and, what's better still, she's as good as she is pretty."

Vera Villette and Nona Nelson exchanged glances as he finished, but Dean had risen to go and once more he did not notice them.

"Don't get jealous, girls," he said, with a mocking laugh. "You are a pair of daisies, all right, all right, but there is only one woman like Marion Marlowe!"

"The brute," muttered Nona, as he left the room.

"He and Ed Gordon are traitors," was Villette's answer. "Are we going to submit to this sort of thing, Nona?"

"What can we do?" asked the soubrette, helplessly. "The girl has bewitched them, but how can we punish her?"

"I'll tell you," muttered the Spanish girl, coming close to her side; "I have a plan in my head that will square us, Nona."

## CHAPTER III.

### A HINT AT VERA'S PLAN.

There were twenty members of the Bergen Square Theatrical Company in the house, enough to demoralize any well-regulated household.

By the time they had been there a week Mrs. Denison was in despair, for they were utterly regardless of the place as well as of the furniture. From six in the morning until noon the house was fairly quiet, but the chambermaids stood about, almost wringing their hands, for there were all the rooms to be done up after luncheon.

Of course, there were boarders who were not "professionals," but they were only ten in number, so they hardly weighed in the balance.

About eleven o'clock the "professionals" began ringing for breakfast, for neither by "hook nor crook" could they be induced to come to the dining-room.

"The airs of them," said Mrs. Denison, as she saw Marion at breakfast the next morning. "Why, they expect me to serve them with coffee and rolls exactly as if I was running a hotel instead of a boarding house."

There were others at the table, so Marion did not reply. She had made up her mind not to say anything further in the matter.

"Well, they are a noisy lot and I wish they were all in Halifax," said a big fat man at her elbow, and Marion knew by the smile that went around the table that the other boarders quite agreed with him.

"They ain't ugly a bit, though," said the landlady again. "They're noisy and destructive, but there ain't none of them vicious."

The door opened as she spoke, and Vera Villette entered. She was dressed in a flaming orange and black plaid wrapper.

It was the first time that she had ever appeared at that early hour, and instantly every eye in the room was turned upon her.

"Well, well, Miss Villette! What has happened?" asked the landlady. "Ain't you made a mistake to git up so early?"

"I have been making a mistake to get up so late," said the actress, smiling. "I didn't realize, Mrs. Denison, what a good breakfast I was missing."

She took her seat at the table with a genial bow. Then, as her eye fell upon Marion, she smiled at her sweetly. "Oh, my dear Miss Marlowe, I was rude to you last night. Pray forgive me—I was so miserably cranky."

Her smile was so sweet that Marion forgave her at once. In a moment it occurred to her what Mrs. Denison had said—that none of these people was really "vicious."

Soon the two were chatting pleasantly, so pleasantly that when the others left the table Marion hardly missed them.

"You must come to the theatre some night," urged Miss Villette, eagerly. "I'll see that you have a ticket. Do come, Miss Marlowe."

Marion hesitated a little before she replied, and the actress thought instantly that she must be opposed to theatres.

"She's a little prude, I'll bet," she thought to herself, but there was nothing in her face to show what she was thinking.

"It's a splendid play, strictly moral, and all that," she said, quickly; "and if you have never seen Lenadrid you have missed half your life! Why, she's the loveliest creature on the stage. You really must see her!"

"I should like to, indeed," began Marion, politely, but once more the Spanish girl interrupted her.

"Or would you like to go behind the scenes?" she asked, with a strange light in her eyes. "That might interest you, Miss

Marlowe, and I would be delighted to take you."

Almost as she spoke Marion Marlowe shuddered. Her question had reminded her of a horrible episode in her life, and for a moment she found it difficult to answer.

"I don't believe I should care for that," she began, and then hesitated. "Why not conquer this aversion to going 'behind the scenes' and be done with it?" she thought.

For Marion had been "behind the scenes" already. For one whole week she had sung in an opera company in the city, and the tragedies that had been crowded into that brief engagement were still fresh in her memory. Hardly a day had passed that she had not been reminded of them, and each time she experienced that same thrill of horror that had just passed over her.

But since then she had been having her voice cultivated for the opera, so, as a life behind the scenes was almost inevitable, she knew it would be well to conquer her morbid feelings in the matter.

"I will be pleased to go with you some night," she said, after brief thought; "that is, if you are sure that it will not inconvenience you any. I should hate to be a nuisance in your dressing-room," she added.

"Nonsense! You could never be that," said the actress, sweetly. "And so you will come—when? To-night, Miss Marlowe?"

"Do you want me so soon?" asked Marion, laughing. "Well, then, I shall be delighted to go with you, as I have no engagements."

Vera Villette smiled and nodded as she left the room. It was the first move in the game which she had planned against Marion.

"She will go," she whispered, as she rushed into Nona Nelson's room, a little later. "The little simpleton is going to the theatre with me this evening, and she's to stay in my dressing-room while I am 'on.' It's the first card I have played, but I already see myself a winner."

Nona Nelson sat up in bed and stared at her a moment.

"You are an awfully clever woman," she said, admiringly; "Ed Gordon don't know who he is trifling with, Vera."

"He should not have insulted me," said the Spanish girl, fiercely; "he said that girl was not only far more beautiful than we girls, but that she also had the advantage of being a lady."

"The meanest thing he could say," was Nona's answer; "and to think that Hugh Dean should actually have repeated it."

"I'll show him what she is; just wait," whispered Vera. "Our time is coming! But I must go, Nona! There's another little thing to be attended to this morning. Did you know that Mr. Temple had discharged Flo Stanley?"

Nona Nelson sat straight up now and stared even harder.

"Do you mean that?" she almost gasped. "Oh, what made him do it?"

"It's Lemadrid, of course! She was jealous of Stanley. The manager liked her, and that settled it, as usual."

"Poor Lemadrid has made a bitter enemy," said Nona, slowly; "and, do you know, I can't help being sorry for her, Vera! She's in love with the manager, and I believe he loathes her!"

"The more reason why she should do exactly as she did," said Vera, scornfully. "Imagine being loathed by one's ex-lover, and submitting to it meekly!"

The black eyes snapped like live coals now, and the Spanish girl shrugged her shoulders with an expressive motion.

"Why, Nona," she hissed, turning fiercely upon her friend, "if any woman were to come between me and the man I loved I would never stop until I crushed her!"

She darted out of the room as she said the last word, while Nona Nelson stared after her and actually shivered.

"Ye gods! what a temper!" she muttered to herself. "Well, I thank my stars that my name is not Marion Marlowe."

## CHAPTER IV.

### A WOMAN'S WARNING.

And well she might, for Marion had made a dangerous enemy.

Vera Villette, in spite of her assertions to the contrary, hated her, both because of her peerless beauty and because her purity and sweetness had won the praise of the one man on earth for whom Vera cared.

For she did love Ed Gordon madly. It was a strange, jealous love that could turn readily to hate, but it was the kind of love that was typical of her country.

"No man should scorn her affection and escape," she had said.

Ed Gordon had done the first; it remained to be seen what would follow.

When she asked Marion to go to the theatre with her it was with a base design in her heart.

She intended to compromise the fair girl in the eyes of Gordon, and she was willing to spend time and strength to accomplish her intentions.

An hour after she left Nona she was seated in a Broadway chop-house with a friend, a big, coarse-looking woman, who fairly glittered with diamonds.

They sat for an hour, sipping wine and talking softly; then Vera suddenly glanced at her watch and rose from the table, saying:

"You will help me, then, Rita? And you will keep the thing secret? Remember, a word and I'll retaliate with a hint about those diamonds!"

"Pooh! You needn't threaten me, Vera. I'll help you all right. I'm always ready to help a friend, and you ought to be one if you ain't," said the woman, coarsely.

"Oh, I'm a friend—so long as things go my way," said the actress, quickly; "but if they defy me—look out! I'm nothing if not vindictive."

She had drunk so much wine that her cheeks were flushed, and there was a light in her eyes that was thoroughly unpleasant.

"I believe that, all right," said the big woman, laughing; "and you are the most dangerous when you are the sweetest, my charming Vera."

The girl darted out of the restaurant, leaving the woman still at the table. There was a rehearsal at eleven, and she had to be at the theatre.

"She'll help me compromise that girl, all right," she muttered, as she walked along. "Rita is all right when she is sober, but it is just as well that I mentioned the diamonds."

Five minutes later a handsome young man dashed into the chop-house. It was Ed Gordon, the actor, in a tearing hurry.

"Give me a cup of coffee," he said to the waiter, and just at that moment he caught sight of the woman.

"Hello, Gordon!" she called out, in her masculine voice.

The actor looked annoyed, as several people turned and stared at him, but he went over politely and answered her greeting.

"What's the matter with you, Gordon?" she asked, in a lower voice. "You are as white as a ghost. Why not have something stronger than coffee?"

"I've sworn off—that's why I'm pale," was the young actor's answer. "I signed the pledge last night—in my mind, of course—and this morning I was confronted by a cup of boarding house coffee. It was a little too much for me, so I ran in here. Sorry to be in a rush, but there's a rehearsal this morning."

"Oh, I say, Gordon!"

The woman had spoken softly, as he was

turning from the table. Ed Gordon looked back at her, and then came a step nearer.

"I hear that Lemadrid got Miss Stanley discharged yesterday—is it true? And when, for goodness' sake, is she going to discharge Vera?"

"Miss Stanley was discharged—I don't know who did it," said Gordon, soberly; "but I have heard no rumors of any trouble with Vera. I guess she'll hold her own with Lemadrid until she begins flirting with the manager."

"Which won't be so long as Ed Gordon is in the company," said the woman, laughing.

Gordon turned away again, this time with a slight shrug of his shoulders.

"She has my consent, I am sure," he said, coldly; "I should never dream of monopolizing Vera."

"Not even if she wished you to?" asked the woman, persistently.

"Certainly not! Why should I?" asked the actor, sharply. "Haven't I a right to select my own companions, Rita?"

This time the woman shrugged her own broad shoulders.

"'Hell has no fury like a woman scorned'," she quoted, lightly. "You are playing with fire, my dear Mr. Gordon."

The actor bowed without a word and went back to his coffee. He was as calm as ever, but a few shades paler.

"That's twice I've been warned about that girl," he thought, as he sipped the beverage. "Well, they don't know me very well if they think that Vera can scare me—no, not if she were ten thousand times a Spaniard!"

In less than five minutes he was out on the street, walking hurriedly along in the direction of the theatre. The words that the woman had said had vanished from his mind, and he was thinking of something that was vastly pleasanter.

Over and over again a vision of Marion Marlowe appeared before him—pure, sweet and beautiful, and as gracious as an empress.

In comparison with her, every woman in the theatrical company appeared vulgar and commonplace—even Miss Lemadrid herself, who was usually called beautiful.

Marion was a strong, healthy girl, round and robust in figure, and the fearless glance of her eye showed that she was reasonably worldly.

"Just the kind of a girl to inspire one with courage and lofty aims," he whispered to himself; "not a beer-guzzling, card-playing, treacherous cat of a woman who smiles in your eyes when she is ready to throttle you; or to ruin the character of a sister woman just because she happens to be jealous of her."

He had seen a great many of this last class of women, and to his sorrow, for he was only twenty-five years of age, and had already spent nine of them behind the footlights.

There was no memory of a mother in this young man's mind, for she had died at his birth, and he had never had a sister.

His mind wandered back to this while he thought of Marion, for, in some way, she awakened every tender instinct of his nature.

Then, suddenly, like a flash, he thought again of Vera, the Spanish girl, who had been his plaything for a year—and for a second such a flood of shame swept over him that he almost staggered on the sunlit pavement.

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## CHAPTER V.

### GORDON'S PROPOSITION.

Henry Temple, the manager of the Bergen Square Company, was one of the handsomest men in the business.

For several years he had been reported engaged to marry his "star," and more than one girl had been forced out of the company I

Miss Lemadrid because she had dared to talk too much to the manager.

Miss Stanley, a handsome blonde, had been the last transgressor, and now, as Temple walked listlessly about the lobby of the theatre he was racking his brains to think where to go, to replace her. True, she was only Miss Lemadrid's understudy, but that was an important part, for, were the star to be taken ill or meet with an accident, the play could not go on without the assistance of such a person.

As Gordon entered the lobby the manager turned to him eagerly.

"Say, Gordon, where the deuce will I find a woman on short notice to fill Stanley's place? Claire has made me discharge her, and left me in a hole. 'Twon't do to risk a night without an understudy."

"Have you tried the theatrical bureaus?" asked Gordon, thoughtfully; "or perhaps you might hit upon some one through the Dramatic Mirror."

"I've looked over the whole list. There's not a name that I want. Miss Lemadrid's understudy has got to be handsome. She could squeeze through without talent, but not without beauty."

"That is so," assented Gordon, with a puzzled look; then, like a flash, he thought of his beautiful fellow boarder. For a moment two emotions struggled valiantly within him.

He would have given his all to have this girl play the opposite part to him for even one evening, but could he suggest such a preposterous thing? It seemed like sacrilege to think of Marion behind the footlights.

"Come, speak out, Gordon! You've thought of some one. I can see it by your face. For heaven's sake, help me out of my hole, old fellow!"

Ed Gordon almost choked as he tried to speak, but he quickly recovered.

"I was thinking of a young girl who boards at our ranch," he said, slowly. "She's as beautiful as a picture, and I am sure she has talent. Of course, I have no idea whether you can get her, Temple."

"Ever been on the stage?" asked the manager, briefly.

"Not that I know of," said Gordon. "She's a stranger to me, Temple. She's a boarder in the house, and our girls are all jealous of her."

"Why?" asked the manager, with a twinkle in his eye. "She hasn't been flirting with you, has she, Gordon? If she has, she had better keep her eye peeled for Vera."

"No, indeed! She's not that kind! That's why I like her," said Gordon, honestly; "but, as I say, she's a perfect beauty, and as pure as she is pretty. I was fool enough to say so, and—well, that precipitated the jealousy."

"So they've got it in for her now, poor thing!" said the man, laughing. "Well, I fancy she's not the girl for me; there is jealousy enough in the company at present."

Gordon was bitterly disappointed. The more he thought about the girl, the more he hoped Temple might engage her.

"Well, that's the best I can do for you," he said, turning away. "I suppose there are lots of 'em to be had, but I don't happen to know them."

He walked out of the lobby and around to the stage door. The first person he saw as he entered was Vera Villette. She was standing in the scene room, talking to the prompter.

"So Stanley had to go, did she?" he heard her say. "Well, if I was in her place I'd square accounts. Still, that isn't saying that I blame Lemadrid."

"She shouldn't have poached upon Lemadrid's preserves," said her companion, laughing. "Why, how would you have felt if she had flirted with Ed Gordon? Put the shoe on your own foot and see how it fits, Vera."

"There are two sides to every subject, I suppose," said the girl, quickly. "Flo had the right to cut Lemadrid out if she could, but I still say that the star would be a fool if she submitted to it tamely."

"Every dog must have his day," quoted the prompter, laughing.

"And, between you and me, Lemadrid's is nearly ended," said Vera, sneering.

She ran up the stairs to her dressing-room as she spoke, without even seeing that Gordon was behind her. In a few minutes the rehearsal was on, and Vera Villette was as pleasant and smiling as ever.

Miss Lemadrid came in a little late, as usual. She was a handsome woman, but just a little past her prime. It required frequent visits to the dressing-room to keep her beauty in perfect order.

She was an imperious woman, and as vain as a peacock. Only her utter obliviousness to beauty in others kept her from treating her sister women abominably.

"Lemadrid is so stuck on herself that she never gets jealous," whispered one of the "supes" to his chum.

"Except when she sees Hal Temple looking at a girl," was the answer, as they stood at the rear, watching her, "and then, for some reason, she never blames Temple."

"No, but she takes it out on the girl, and she's as cruel as they make," said the other, quickly. "I've been with her two years, and I've seen her kick out a dozen."

"If she doesn't do worse than that they are lucky," said the man. "That little Spanish devil would stick a knife in them in a moment."

"Yes, it's lucky Gordon is so attentive," laughed the other. "He'd better leave the company when he gets ready to drop her."

They were looking at Vera now as she stood near Miss Lemadrid, and in spite of her smiles they had read her nature.

The rehearsal was a short one and went off smoothly. At its close Ed Gordon found himself in the scene-room with the manager.

"I've been thinking that over, Gordon," said Mr. Temple, with a smile. "I've got so much confidence in your judgment that I would like to see that girl. Is there any way you can fix it to introduce me, without the rest of the company knowing it for the present?"

Mr. Gordon looked at him quickly, but understood at once.

"I guess that is wise," he said, with a nod. "The less the others know, the better, for a time, and I'll try to think of some way for you to meet Miss Marlowe."

There was a light step behind them, and Vera Villette came up with a smile on her face that was really enchanting.

"Oh, Mr. Temple!" she cried. "I want to tell you a secret! Ed has fallen in love with a beautiful young girl, and I'm going to have her behind the scenes this very evening!"

Ed Gordon stared at her. The manager could hardly believe his senses; but with a sly wink at the actor, the manager turned toward her.

"Who is she, Miss Villette? Do tell me her name, and, for heaven's sake, tell me why it is that you are not jealous!"

"Oh, we women are not all Lemadrids," said the girl, with a sneer. "We are not all traveling around with our hearts on our sleeves; but when it comes to resenting insults, we know how to do it!"

"I fancy you do," said Temple, laughing. "Lemadrid is stupid to care what I do; but you have not told me the name of Gordon's charmer."

"Oh, it's Marion Marlowe, or something of that sort. You shall see her to-night, if you will come to my dressing-room." She darted away, leaving Gordon staring after her.

"It couldn't be better," said the manager, softly. "It will give me a chance to meet the girl without any one dreaming why I wish to see her."

"It isn't that," muttered Gordon, with a stifled groan. "What I don't like is to think of her being with Vera."

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## CHAPTER VI.

### A COMPROMISING POSITION.

Marion had felt a little sorry all day that she had accepted the invitation from Miss Villette to go to the theatre with her, but as the hour drew near for Vera to call for her she began to look forward to an evening behind the scenes with considerable eagerness.

Perhaps the thought of Ed Gordon had something to do with it, for it was more than probable that she would meet the handsome young actor, and she had finally discovered that he was really very attractive.

As for Vera Villette, she hardly knew what to think of her. She was certainly impulsive, but Marion could not believe that she was bad or deliberately heartless.

The young girl was so true and loyal herself that she was slow in recognizing the baser traits in others—always preferring to think of them with sisterly charity.

When they started for the theatre they were both in good spirits, and Vera was more than affectionate in her manner.

Marion was dressed all in white, and was wondrously beautiful. Her eyes shone like stars from under a wide brimmed white leghorn hat. Compared with Vera Villette, she was like a pure white lily, while the Spanish girl resembled nothing so much as a gorgeous poppy.

Claire Lemadrid, hurrying from her carriage with her maid at her heels, caught just a brief glimpse of the beautiful girl who was Vera's companion as they were entering the stage door.

As she climbed the stairs to the star's dressing room she found two of her company waiting for her.

"Oh, Miss Lemadrid, won't you please get me excused to night?" asked Nona Nelson, who was one of them.

Miss Lemadrid looked at her sharply, and then, in a business-like voice, inquired:

"What for, Nona?"

For the life of her, Nona Nelson could not say, but after stammering a minute, she finally answered:

"I—I am sick—or, at least, I don't feel well," she said, hesitatingly; "and I thought, just for once, Miss Ellis might go on in my place."

"Have you asked Mr. Thompson?" asked Miss Lemadrid, with another keen look.

Thompson was the stage manager, and the one Nona should have asked, but it was the habit for the girls to go to Miss Lemadrid. She was more civil to them, and at least she did not swear as Thompson did.

"Yes, ma'am, I asked him," said Nona, dolefully; "but he only snapped at me, so I have come to you, Miss Lemadrid"

"And I will not ask him to excuse you," said the actress, promptly. "You are not sick a bit, Nona, you are only faking."

She swept on toward her room with Nona Nelson glaring after her angrily. Miss Ellis, who had been waiting to hear the result, drew a long sigh of disappointment.

"Just my luck," she murmured. "She'll never give me a chance! I know I could play that part better than you, Nona, but, of course, I'll never get a chance to prove it."

"You can't touch me in the part," snapped Miss Nelson, angrily; "but I was willing you should try, just to see you make a fool of yourself."

"I guess you had other reasons, Miss Insolence," was her companion's answer. "You've probably got a date with some Johnny or other."

Miss Nelson would have replied, but just then Vera Villette called her, and she ran hastily to the little dressing-room that they occupied together.

"First call!" came in stentorian tones from the bottom of the stairs.

Both girls stripped off their street costumes and began putting on their stage gowns, while Marion sat on a trunk and chatted with them pleasantly.

"So she wouldn't let you off," whispered Vera in her friend's ear, when she saw her opportunity

Nona shook her head and then looked at her inquiringly.

"I'll fix it some way," muttered Vera, angrily. "I won't be baffled! I'll settle it this evening."

Another call had sounded, just as the girls were ready. They had dressed and made up with astounding swiftness.

"Will you come down to the wings, Miss Marlowe?" asked Vera, sweetly, "or would you prefer to sit here, where you will be more quiet? Miss Ellis, or some of the girls, will come in and talk to you."

As she asked the question she was scribbling something on a bit of paper. It was a hasty note, addressed to one of the actors.

"I think I'll just sit here through the first act, if you don't mind," said Marion, sweetly. "I have a little headache, but it will pass away presently."

"Couldn't be better," whispered Vera to Nona as they went out; then she called a boy and handed him the note, instructing him to deliver it immediately.

"That's the second move in the game," said Vera again, as she and Nona hurried across the scene room to the left of the stage. "Ned Hale hates Gordon, and he's in love with me. He'll go into the dressing-room and lock the door, and I have planned to have Gordon take Mr. Temple up there. It's lucky there is time before either of them has a chance to come on, for it gives me a chance to start the ball a-rolling."

"But she may not let Hale into the dressing-room at all," said Nona, softly. "She'd fly at him in a minute if he made any advances."

"I'd be a fool if I hadn't fixed all that," was the reply, and just then Vera heard her cue and darted out before the footlights.

Meanwhile Marion had seated herself on the only chair in the little dressing-room, and with her head on her hand, she was busily thinking. She could not quite understand Vera Villette's cordiality, but she was willing to accept her friendship so long as it seemed honest.

She was aroused from her reverie by some one opening the door. She looked up quickly, and saw a large, handsome man of about thirty years of age standing in the doorway. There was nothing about him that looked like an actor, for Ned Hale had not put any "make-up" on his face, and it happened that his costume for the first act was that of a workman.

"I beg pardon," he began, quickly. "I thought the room was empty. I was told to come in and look at the gas pipes, but, of course——"

He hesitated and looked at her, and Marion spoke up promptly.

"Don't let me interfere with your work in any way, sir. If I am in your way I can go down to the wings or——"

"No, indeed; you'll not bother me at all," said the man, quickly. "I'll just step in and look at them; it won't take a minute."

He stepped through the door, closing it softly behind him, and as Marion moved her chair a little nearer to the wall he snapped the spring lock so gently that she did not hear him.

The next moment he went over and made believe examine the pipes. There was not a sound in the room as he stood looking at them intently. Suddenly some one tapped gently on the door. Then a hand was laid on the knob to open it.

Marion caught her breath as she saw that the door was locked. It was an unpleasant situation, even if the fellow were a workman.

"The door is locked! Unfasten it quickly," she said, softly. "Oh, sir, you were very thoughtless to lock it after you."

"Spring lock," muttered Hale, as he moved to the door.

"What the deuce is the matter?" asked Gordon from outside. "Vera certainly told me that Miss Marlowe was here, but she did not mention that she was keeping her a prisoner."

Marion Marlowe had managed at last to open the door, and as she did so Ed Gordon and Mr. Temple confronted her in the doorway, and both stood staring at her with strange expressions on their faces.

## CHAPTER VII.

### MARION MAKES ANOTHER ENEMY.

The moment Ed Gordon saw who it was in the room he turned upon his heel and walked swiftly away, leaving Mr. Temple to do as he pleased in the matter.

He was mortified and hurt, as well as astonished.

Ned Hale and Miss Marlowe in the dressing-room with the door locked—the thing was almost incredible for a moment.

Then, as he reached his own dressing-room and slammed the door behind him a sneer crossed his handsome face, making it almost repulsive.

"Pshaw!" he muttered, aloud; "she is like all the rest of them, in spite of her pretty face! To think that I had told Temple how pure and sweet she was, and then to find her locked in a dressing-room with that common, low fellow!"

He was fuming with chagrin over his own position in the matter, but there was an undercurrent of disappointment that hurt him cruelly.

Since the previous night he had reached the point where he almost worshipped Miss Marlowe. She had lifted him to new heights which he had never dreamed of, only to cast him down into the deepest humiliation. But while he was fuming with rage in his own dressing-room, a very different scene was being enacted in Vera's.

Marion Marlowe's face was flushed with annoyance when she opened the door, and this was, probably, what made Gordon fancy she looked guilty.

To add to her discomfiture, Ned Hale brushed past her without a word, but with a wink at the manager that might have meant anything, but which certainly did not serve to explain matters honestly.

Mr. Temple caught the wink, and a smile stole over his face, but in an instant he was speaking politely to Marion.

"I am very sorry, indeed, that we intruded, Mr. Gordon and I, but Ed was so anxious that I should meet you, and Miss Villette told us that she had left you in her dressing-room. I am sure you will forgive me and allow me to introduce myself. My name is Henry Temple, and I am the manager of the company."

He bowed low to Marion and seemed most respectful in his manner, but the young girl was still indignant that she should be so misunderstood by him.

"I am glad to meet you, Mr. Temple," she said, quickly, "and I assure you I am greatly annoyed at what has happened. Miss Villette left me here, as she said, but she forgot to tell me that I was to have company, and when the workman came in to fix the pipes he carelessly sprang the lock behind him. It was an embarrassing position, but I am sure you will understand it. A lady does not often stoop to flirting with the gas man!"

"But that wasn't——" began Mr. Temple, and then stopped short. It had suddenly occurred to him what the whole affair meant, and he had also discovered that the girl was innocent.

"Don't think of it again, Miss Marlowe," he said, quickly. "Mr. Gordon was an idiot to bolt as he did, but he is naturally jealous, and he possibly did not look at the fellow."

"Mr. Gordon has no reason to be jealous of me," said Marion, haughtily. "We are fellow boarders, but no more, I can assure you, Mr. Temple."

"But he wishes to be more," said the manager, laughing. "He wants you to be his fellow-worker as well—in fact, will you kindly listen to his proposition, Miss Marlowe?"

The girl's beautiful eyes flew open in surprise. They were both standing in the door of the dressing-room, and there was no one to overhear them.

"There is a vacancy in the cast," said Mr. Temple, talking rapidly. "Miss Lenadrid's understudy has left us, and we want another. That was what Mr. Gordon brought me here to talk to you about, Miss Marlowe."

"Is it possible that you mean to offer me the position?" asked Marion, breathlessly. "Why, I have never acted a part in my life! I am only a singer."

"Then you have been on the stage?" asked the manager, quickly.

"I was with the Temple Opera Company one week last winter," said Marion, shortly.

"I was on the bills as Signorita Ila de Parloa."

"What! The beautiful singer who sang last season in comic opera?" exclaimed the manager, quickly. "Why, I heard you twice myself! You sing magnificently, Miss Marlowe!"

Mr. Temple was excited and spoke a little louder than he meant, and Claire Lemadrid, coming slowly up the narrow steps to her dressing-room, caught her breath with a gasp as she stopped to listen.

"You are very kind to say so," said Marion, simply; "but I am a little bewildered by your proposition, Mr. Temple."

"Take a day to think it over," said the manager, as he heard the music of the orchestra, which signified that the act was over. "I will give you the position of Miss Lemadrid's understudy at thirty dollars per week, and I hope to goodness that Claire will have the grace to get sick for one night, at least, so that I can see you play the part, Miss Marlowe."

This last was said laughingly, and Marion took it as it was meant, but Claire Lemadrid, who was still listening, ground her teeth with rage. She was just jealous enough, naturally, to be sure he meant it.

"So it was for this he was so willing to discharge Miss Stanley," she whispered, furiously. "He already has his eye on that beautiful girl, and he hopes I will be sick so that she will be able to supplant me!"

She was still standing at the top of the narrow iron steps as she whispered the words, and she hissed them so loudly that one of her company heard them.

Vera Villette was just behind her, and she laughed harshly as she listened. She had not caught every word, but that did not matter.

The "star" wheeled around on her in a perfect fury.

"So this is your doing!" she said, in a harsh whisper. "You have brought this girl here to undermine me, Vera!"

"On the contrary," said the Spanish girl, in a smothered tone. "I brought that girl here for quite another purpose, Lemadrid. She is my guest to-night because I hate her!"

There was no mistaking the venom in her tones.

Claire Lemadrid bent forward and held out her hand to her.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### MR. GORDON HEARS NEWS.

Ed Gordon did not see Mr. Temple again that night. He was so annoyed and humiliated that he avoided him purposely.

He did not even know whether the manager had made his proposition to Marion or not, or how the young girl had taken his interview.

For Gordon still thought that the girl was really a willing party to that compromising situation in the dressing room, for how else, he argued, could Ned Hale, the most unscrupulous fellow in the company, have gone in and locked the door, if the girl had not been willing?

It did not once occur to him to suspect Vera in the matter, or even to credit Marion with being capable of being deceived by her.

Gordon was an unsuspicious fellow, in spite of his knowledge of the world, and he could never quite comprehend the extent of treachery in some women.

Vera was quick-tempered and spiteful, but he did not dream that she was worse, for this was the first time in their acquaintance that he had aroused her jealousy.

During the performance he kept to himself as closely as possible, but even on the stage both Hale and Vera taunted him with their speeches. They seemed glorying in the fact that he had been deceived in Marion.

"Thought she was an angel, didn't you?" whispered Vera in his ear, just as, in one part of the act, he was obliged to pause near her.

"A deucedly pretty girl, and so affectionate," murmured Hale, as they passed at the rear of the stage. "So glad Vera introduced us. I've got a date with her already."

Gordon said nothing, but he was beginning to understand Vera better now. She had laid the trap without a doubt, but who could tell how willingly the girl had fallen into it?

As he rushed from the theatre he heard the

manager calling him, but he pretended not to hear; he could not face him.

Miss Lemadrid's carriage was standing at the stage door, and as Gordon passed it a woman's face appeared at the window.

"Hello, Gordon!" called Rita Esmonde, in her vulgar manner. "I'm waiting for Lemadrid. Can't you stop and talk a minute?"

"I'm in an awful hurry; please excuse me," said Gordon, quickly; but the woman's head only protruded a little further.

"Hold on, Gordon! You must stop! There's something I want to say," she urged, persistently.

Ed Gordon frowned, but came back to the carriage.

"What is it, Rita? Some gossip, I suppose! If you knew how I hate it you wouldn't bother me with it!"

"But this concerns you especially, so you ought to know it," she said, softly; then she sank her coarse voice to almost a whisper.

"Vera is fooling you, Gordon, and I wouldn't be your friend if I didn't tell you! If you are anxious to shake the girl, come to my house whenever I send for you, and I'll let you see for yourself what the little minx is doing."

Ed Gordon stared at her for about a minute, and a scornful look overspread his features.

Twenty four hours ago he would not have cared a picayune about what Vera was doing, but now—well, he would be glad to be rid of the girl; but he would have been far gladder if he still had faith in Miss Marlowe.

He drew himself up and shrugged his shoulders disdainfully. The rest of the company were coming out now, and Lemadrid would be ready for her carriage in a minute.

"A woman's loyalty to her sister woman is something marvelous," he said, sneeringly. "You call Vera your friend, and yet you are ready to betray her! No! I am no spy, Rita! I won't watch the girl. If she is happy with some one else, I am truly delighted."

"But don't you want the proof?" asked the cultured, unabashed woman, quickly. "You can't accuse her of anything that you can't prove, Ed, and you'd better not try; you know her temper."

"But I refuse to spy upon her," said the actor again. "If I could find out honorably, that would be different."

"See here, Gordon," said the woman, putting her face almost up to his own. "You are a fool if you don't come, and that is all there is about it, and, besides, Miss Marlowe will be there! Isn't that an inducement?"

Ed Gordon started back as if she had struck him.

"What! Marion Marlowe at your house!" he said, indignantly. Then again, the feeling that he had been a fool sprang up within him.

"Well, why not, I should like to know?" asked the woman, with a show of indignation. "Is my house so bad that Marion Marlowe cannot enter it? A girl who actually makes love to men the first time she meets them!"

Ed Gordon turned on his heel and rushed away from the carriage. He was almost overcome by the violence of his feelings.

The next minute Miss Lemadrid came out of the stage door. She was walking close to Vera Villette, and both were whispering softly.

Marion Marlowe was just behind, walking with Nona Nelson. She had been introduced to Miss Lemadrid, and found her delightful.

However talented these three women were when standing before the footlights, they were certainly all clever actresses in their own life tragedies.

They had smiled and chatted with Marion as though they almost loved her, while all of the three were secretly planning to injure her.

Marion had kept her conversation with the manager a secret from them all, and she did not even dream that Miss Lemadrid had overheard it.

For reasons of her own the "star" did not repeat what she had heard. She hoped to nip the whole thing in the bud, without so much as a rumor being started.

"Then that is settled, Vera," she whispered, stopping a little way from the carriage. "You will see Hale to night or to morrow, and you can depend upon him to carry out

your scheme. He is dead in love with you — a kiss will pay him."

"And he shall have one or not, as I happen to feel," said the girl, coldly. "My motto is get what you can, then act your own pleasure in the matter of reciprocation."

Miss Lemadrid looked at her with a strange gleam in her eyes. She had never been able to live up to such a motto.

"Good-night, Miss Lemadrid," said Marion, sweetly. "I am delighted to have seen you act to-night, as well as to have had the pleasure of meeting you."

"Good-night, dear. So charmed to have seen you," murmured the actress.

She shook hands cordially, and then got into her carriage.

"The deceitful little idiot! She was delighted to meet me, was she!" were her first words to her friend, Rita Esmonde. "Well, I'll make her wish that she had never heard the name, much less seen the face, of Claire Lemadrid!"

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## CHAPTER IX.

### VERA'S SECOND INVITATION.

When Marion retired that night she was radiantly happy, for at last there seemed a chance of realizing one of her greatest ambitions.

Mr. Temple had offered her a position, and she was determined to accept it, but first she meant to consult with some of her friends on the subject.

In reviewing the evening there was one dark spot. That episode in the dressing-room annoyed her terribly.

Not once did she gain an inkling of the truth, although she told both Vera and Nona of the occurrence as soon as they returned to the dressing-room.

Of course the two girls feigned to be greatly surprised, and appeared to sympathize deeply with her sensitiveness in the matter.

"So mean of Gordon to bolt that way," said Vera, with a sly wink at the soubrette; "but then it's just like him. He's awfully suspicious. No doubt he thought that the fellow was making love to you."

"Why, that would be absurd!" said Marion, hotly. "I trust Mr. Gordon is more of a gentleman than that! And as for Mr. Temple, he assured me that he understood it."

"Still, it was awkward for you, dear," said Vera, sweetly, while she inwardly rejoiced that her plan had been so successful.

After the first act Marion had gone with them to the wings, but she little dreamed that one of the "king's courtiers" in a gorgeous, gold-trimmed costume was no other than the "workman" who had so annoyed her. After that, had come the meeting with Claire Lemadrid, but through the entire evening Mr. Gordon avoided her.

Marion thought of it now, and was greatly troubled by the actor's action.

He had certainly demonstrated that he did possess a suspicious nature, and further, he showed a lack of discrimination that, to Marion's mind, seemed almost unpardonable.

She went to sleep thinking of the actor's handsome face just as she had seen it, flushed with chagrin, at the door of the dressing-room.

The first mail in the morning brought her a letter from Mr. Temple. In it he reiterated his proposition of the night before, and assured her that he was ready for her to sign a season's contract.

Evidently Mr. Temple had been favorably impressed with her, at any rate, and if this was the case she could afford to take no notice of Gordon until such time as he saw fit to explain his conduct.

She was sitting in her room reading over her letter when her friend, Alma Allyn, came in. Miss Allyn was a newspaper reporter, and wonderfully shrewd and clever.

"I'm not so sure about this being a good thing for you, dear," she said, after Marion showed her the letter.

"But I must work at something, for my money will soon be gone," said Marion, quickly; "and some way I have suddenly become ambitious to be an actress, and Miss Lemadrid's part is an excellent beginning!"

"I should say so, but tell me about the company," began Miss Allyn, cautiously, but a second later she had thought of something more important.

"Oh, Marion, I forgot to tell you the news!" she cried, suddenly. "Mr. Ray is

coming back from Florida soon. It was in the morning paper; aren't you delighted, girlie?"

Marion looked up quickly, in joyful surprise.

"I am very glad, indeed," she managed to say. "He wrote me last week that he was coming soon, but perhaps his plan is to come sooner and surprise us."

"Well, the papers have stopped that," said Miss Allyn, laughing. "That's a way they have, to nip everything in the bud. When rich people want to know what they are going to do next, they have only to look in the papers."

"And who is to blame for that?" asked Marion, slyly.

"We reporters, of course," was Miss Allyn's prompt answer. "Poor things! We are nothing, if not too previous!"

"As slangy as ever, Alma!" said Marion, laughing, and just then there was a tap on her door, and Nona Nelson entered.

"Miss Villette begs that you will go to the performance with us again to-night," she said, sweetly, after she had been introduced to Miss Allyn. "We have a glorious plan in view, but I mustn't tell it! Do say you will go—that's a dear, Miss Marlowe!"

Marion had slipped the manager's letter in her pocket as Nona entered, and now she smiled a little as she accepted the invitation.

"As far as I know now, I will go with pleasure," she said, sweetly; "but I'll not stay alone in the dressing-room for a single minute."

Miss Nelson laughed as she left the room. She was more than delighted with Marion's ready acceptance.

"She's a perfect little dunce," she said to Vera when she got back. "Why, all you have to do is set your trap, and in she walks! Well, to-night will settle her influence over Ed Gordon, I fancy!"

"He'll think I'm a saint in comparison with her," said Vera, bitterly.

"But you've got to punish Gordon!" said Nona, quickly; "for he is dead in love with her, and you know it, Vera!"

Vera Villette scowled, and her black eyes flashed angrily.

"He's a fool!" she muttered. "To think of his daring to insult me!"

The two girls were just eating their coffee and rolls that Mrs. Denison had sent up, and for a moment or two both relapsed into silence.

Finally Vera spoke in an unusually low tone, as if she feared the walls might be listening.

"Rita has got the thing fixed, and Ned will do his part! If everything goes all right that girl's character will be ruined."

"Which means that Ed Gordon will despise her, and himself in the bargain!" murmured Nona, softly. "A man always hates to find himself out a fool, but it's a pity you couldn't give Lemadrid a few lessons, Vera!"

Vera Villette looked up with an expression of interest on her face.

"I don't quite understand why Lemadrid hates her so," she said, slowly. "Surely the girl couldn't have 'poached on her preserves,' as the prompter calls it, yet she seems to be positively vicious toward Marion Marlowe."

"Poor girl!" said Nona, with a mocking laugh. "There isn't much hope for her, with two such enemies!"

## CHAPTER X.

### THE RETURN OF MR. RAY.

Mr. Temple had outlined his wishes to Marion in his letter, and after her talk with Miss Allyn, Marion was more decided than ever to accept them.

He wished her to watch the performance of Miss Lemadrid from the front for a few nights, and, in the meantime, he would prepare the contract, and in a very few days she could begin rehearsing. Until the contract was signed he wished her to keep the matter secret, both because she might decide not to accept the offer, as well as for other reasons of a different nature.

This was why Marion was so willing to accept Miss Villette's invitation. She felt that another night behind the scenes would help her considerably, and there was still plenty of time to view the performance from the auditorium.

"I want to get acquainted with the company a little," she explained to Miss Allyn.

"They are awfully queer, but Mrs. Denison says they are not 'vicious.' In some way I want to study them for myself before I decide to be one of them."

"You would never be one of them, Marion, in a thousand years," said Miss Allyn, laughing; "not but that there are lots of dear, good women among them, but there is something about you that is different, dear, and I think you are quite right to wish to study them."

But Marion was not destined to spend the evening behind the scenes, for another hasty note from Mr. Temple made her presence "in front" imperative.

"Miss Lemadrid has a cold," he wrote, in a hurried scrawl, "and if it should develop badly we would be caught in a hole. Shall want you to come to rehearsal to-morrow."

A copy of her rôle was carefully inclosed, which proved conclusively that the manager was in earnest. Marion read the note, and then went down to see Miss Villette. The actress was out, so she left a note under her door, asking to be excused from her promise for the evening.

"I'll be with her to-morrow evening, all right," she whispered to herself. Then she began to wonder how her fellow actors would treat her.

Marion's married sister, Dollie, was living in the city, and, after leaving the note for Miss Villette, the young girl started out to visit her.

A block from the house she came suddenly face to face with Mr. Ray, the old friend whom the newspapers stated was only just leaving Florida.

There was an exclamation of delight as the two sprang forward. For a moment neither spoke, but only clasped hands, silently.

"My dear Miss Marlowe, how are you?" asked the young man, finally, at the same time scrutinizing her face in the most eager manner.

"I am as well as ever, thank you," murmured the young girl, sweetly. "And you, Mr. Ray; you are looking splendid!"

"And feeling better," said the young man, laughing. "But I have a disappointment for you," he added, quickly; "my sister did not come up with me. I came—well, principally on business."

The little hesitation in his speech made Marion glance up at him, and instantly both her face and neck were suffused with blushes.

No woman could have misunderstood the look in Archie Ray's eyes. It was one of patient, ardent devotion, for he had loved her long and devotedly.

For a moment there was a silence, and then Marion spoke.

"You were coming to call on me, were you not?" she asked, shyly. "Do come right to the house, where we can have a long talk! It is only a boarding house, but there's a monstrous big parlor."

"A little one would do, Marion," said Archie Ray, softly; "but tell me, are there any fussy old ladies in that 'monstrous' parlor? I have always been told that there was no boarding house without them."

Marion laughed gaily at his words, for they were pretty nearly true. There were three old ladies, at least, in the house, and they were all dreadful gossips.

"I guess they are inevitable," she said in reply; "but we might be lucky enough to escape them."

"Excuse me. We'll not take any chances," said Mr. Ray, quickly. "We'll just walk over to the Fifth Avenue, and you can rest while I call a carriage. Then a drive through the park will give us a chance to chat a little."

This programme sounded delightful, for Marion loved driving, but that look in her friend's eyes made her a trifle uneasy.

Archie Ray had told her that he loved her in days gone by. If he told her so again, how should she answer him? During her life in the city she had met many men who interested her—many that were all that was good and noble. Of these, she had been the most inclined toward Archibald Ray and Dr. Reginald Brookes. Both had asked her for her hand. Both had been told to wait. Marion felt that she must thoroughly love the man to whom she would finally entrust her destiny. She admired both her lovers, but as yet her heart had not felt for any man that responsive thrill that would tell her definitely that she had met "the one man in all the world." As friends she accepted Mr. Ray and Dr. Brookes. Perhaps either would

be more to her some day—perhaps not—but as yet she was heart free. As to the future—well, she knew that when she met the man, her heart would give her ample notice of the event.

She began talking of other things as they walked along, but she was summoning all her wits to avoid a *tête-a-tête* in the carriage.

But try as she would, she could think of no excuse. She had no engagement to plead, and then she was truly glad to see him. After all, why should she dread hearing again that he loved her?

There was a happy feeling in her heart that was reflected in her eyes, and as they walked along her face grew more and more beautiful. Archie Ray was so handsome—so true and so noble! Yet as she walked and talked she found herself as puzzled as ever. She could not say truly that she really loved the loyal fellow.

There were old friends to be mentioned and old episodes to be talked over, and then Marion told him of her ambition and her opportunity to be an actress.

Mr. Ray looked grave when she came to the latter. He respected the profession, but the majority of the "professionals" disgusted him.

"It will be a terrible life for you," he said, as they entered the hotel parlor. "They are the most jealous people in the world, and you, with your beauty, will be a target for their spears. I dread to think of you on the stage; it will be a terrible experience!"

"Oh, but if I triumph!" cried Marion, whose cheeks were tingling at his words.

Mr. Ray looked at her admiringly before he answered.

"You are bound to do that," he said, with a smile; "but at what a cost of faith in human nature!"

"I shall never lose faith in human nature while you live, Mr. Ray," she said, charmingly. "You and Dr. Brookes, Miss Allyn and Bert Jackson and one or two others of my loyal friends will always be able to preserve the balance."

Mr. Ray smiled tenderly as he raised his hat.

"Now for a carriage and a drive this glorious day," he said, brightly. "Please excuse me for just a minute, Miss Marlowe."

Ten minutes later Marion left the hotel and was bustled into a carriage by her handsome companion. As they drove away a pair of jealous eyes watched them, for Ed Gordon, the actor, was standing in the hotel corridor.

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## CHAPTER XI.

### MARION'S STARTLING ANNOUNCEMENT.

But the ride through the park ended without any declaration of love, although the words trembled on Archie Ray's lips and he was longing to speak them.

The ride ended with a luncheon and an arrangement to accompany Marion to the theatre that evening to witness the acting of Claire Lemadrid.

All that afternoon Marion studied the part that had been sent to her. She was wonderfully apt at learning, and had conquered two-thirds of it before dinner.

That night at the theatre she studied Lemadrid carefully. Every word and gesture was noted and remembered. Over and over again as the "star" reached a climax Marion leaned forward with dilated eyes, watching for a great portrayal of emotion, and in nearly every instance she leaned back with a sigh, for the actress had missed by a hair's breadth the height and grandeur of her opportunity.

Early the next morning Marion called at Mr. Temple's office. This was in response to another note, which was even more urgent.

"You will be on hand at two o'clock, then," said the manager, as she left him, after a long conversation over the rôle in question.

"I will," was Marion's answer; "but it makes me tremble to think of it, sir. I can't help feeling, some way, that your star will resent my presence.

"Nonsense, Miss Marlowe! But what if she does? I am manager of this theatre. I've had enough of Lemadrid and her jealousies!"

He spoke decidedly and Marion felt that he meant it; yet she could not rid herself of the feeling that Miss Lemadrid would be angry.

"It must be one of my intuitions," she said

to herself, by way of explanation; "for no one could be sweeter to me than Miss Lemadrid was the other night—unless it is Miss Villette and Miss Nelson."

When she got back to the boarding house she tapped on Miss Villette's door, but her tap was so gentle that the actress did not hear her.

Before she could tap again she heard the actress speak, but her voice was so shrill and strained that she hardly recognized it.

"Oh, Ed, Ed!" she cried, bitterly; "have you forgotten everything? Don't you remember the times that you have sworn that you loved me?"

"Yes, I remember them all distinctly," came the answer in Ed Gordon's voice. "To my shame be it said, I have lied to a woman."

"Lied!"

The Spanish girl's voice fairly hissed the word.

"You have lied to me, Ed? Then beware! You traitor!"

Marion fled upstairs, her heart beating furiously. Not for the world would she have overheard such a conversation willingly.

But there was no time to think over other people's affairs now. She must learn the rest of her part before she went to rehearsal.

When she finally saw Vera it was at the luncheon table. The Spanish girl was a trifle pale, but as smiling and pleasant as ever.

Ed Gordon did not come in, and Marion was truly thankful. She was beginning to despise the handsome young actor.

There were a dozen members of the company sitting at the table, and just at the right moment Marion imparted her information.

"Oh, Miss Villette, I have a secret for you!" she said, in her merry voice, speaking across the table. "Of course your friends are all welcome to hear it, but as you are responsible for what 'I have been and gone and done,' I am going to make you a special *confidante* in the matter!"

Every eye was turned upon her, and Miss Villette looked genuinely puzzled. Her face turned a shade paler, but she stared calmly at Marion.

"I shall be delighted to hear what you have 'been and gone and done,'" she said, smiling; "particularly if I am to blame, so do hurry and tell me."

"Well, you see," said Marion, soberly, "you took me behind the scenes with you the other evening, and I must have gotten stage struck, or something of that sort, for to-day I signed a contract and am a member of your company."

There was a breathless silence after this announcement, and Vera Villette seemed to grow paler and paler. She was a splendid actress in some particular lines, but this scene of Marion's had staggered her completely.

"What! No congratulations?" said Marion, looking wonderingly around; "and I did so hope that you would all give me at least a greeting."

There was a hasty glance exchanged between Vera and Nona, and at that moment Hugh Dean, the comedian, pushed his chair back from the table.

"That is the worst night's work that Miss Villette ever did, Miss Marlowe," he said, looking straight at the young girl. "You might better have joined a circus and ridden in the cage with the lion than to have signed with the Bergen Square Theatrical Company, with its lot of jealous women!"

"On the contrary," cried Nona Nelson, sarcastically, "Miss Marlowe will be perfectly safe. Why, hasn't she two protectors already—Hugh Dean and Ed Gordon?"

Marion Marlowe stared from one to the other. This manner of taking her news was, to say the least, extraordinary.

"I congratulate you, Miss Marlowe, with all my heart," said a soft voice, sweetly. Vera Villette had recovered her composure and was leaning across the table, holding out her hand to Marion.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE REHEARSAL.

Claire Lemadrid was not at the rehearsal which had been called principally on account of her new understudy. She had a very bad cold and was saving her voice for the evening, but it was rumored that she was furious with rage over Manager Temple's action in engaging Marion.

"At last Lemadrid has to admit that her

beauty is eclipsed," said Miss Ellis to Nona, as they met in the scene room. "Miss Marlowe's pretty face is raising havoc with the men. Why, I hear that Ed Gordon is dead in love with her!"

"Most men are fools over a pretty face, and some of them may yet learn that fact, to their sorrow," was Nona Nelson's only answer.

A dozen or more members of the company came in just then, so Nona made her way to the dressing-room which she shared with Vera.

"What do you think? Thompson has put Miss Marlowe in Lemadrid's dressing-room for to-day," whispered Vera; "and furthermore, he says it is by Temple's orders."

"So she has bewitched him, too, has she?" asked Nona, bitterly. "Well, I guess that means she won't stay long in the company."

"I am not so sure," said the Spanish girl, while a frown darkened her face. "I've got it pretty straight that Temple has put his foot down. They say he is done with Lemadrid forever."

"Well, what are we going to do?" asked the soubrette, anxiously. "With the manager behind her, we are helpless, Vera! She can turn the head of every man in the company, and if we say a word, no doubt Temple will fire us!"

A cunning gleam stole into the treacherous Spaniard's eye.

"You are a simpleton, Nona," she whispered, sharply. "The more opposition there is to be met, the more shrewd we must be. That girl is an eyesore to me, with her innocent, angel face! And besides, hasn't she come between me and my love?"

"Oh, you admit it, do you? Then you do love him!" said Nona, quickly. "Well, you've lost him, Vera! He's gone mad over Marion Marlowe!"

"And I will make him hate her—loathe her—despise her!" hissed the Spanish girl, furiously. "I will work stealthily, carefully, but I will leave no stone unturned! That girl shall be ruined in the eyes of every member of this company, and that before I am many days older!" She was so terrible in her anger that Nona Nelson almost shivered. She was vicious and unprincipled herself, but this girl was positively murderous.

The call to the stage sounded just then, and in an instant every member of the cast came flocking from the dressing-rooms.

As Marion Marlowe came out of Miss Lemadrid's special room, nearly every eye was turned upon her.

Of course the news had spread around that she had been engaged for the part, and Marion knew only too well that she was the sole topic of conversation.

Vera Villette greeted her the most pleasantly of any member of the company, and the young girl felt deeply grateful for the little attention she showed her.

It was an awkward position for Marion, but she bore it bravely, and her previous experience behind the scenes with the Temple Opera Company made her feel quite at home in her new surroundings.

As they all stood waiting in the wings Nona got a chance to whisper to Vera. It was something about Ned Hale, and her friend answered softly:

"He got excused from rehearsal at my suggestion. I did not want her to see him until she had to. One of the supes will do his part for him."

Nona smiled grimly as she listened.

"You are a deep one, Vera," she said, briefly. "I wish I knew the whole of your plan. You are going to 'do' the girl one way or another!"

"I'll tell you when the time comes," was the low reply. "We Spaniards have no pleasure in sharing our honors."

A harsh laugh followed the last remark, and just then the rehearsal was begun by a call for Miss Marlowe. Marion walked out on the stage from the proper entrance, and at the stage manager's order began speaking the first lines of her part.

Her voice was sweet and musical, but strong and ringing, every word falling clear and distinct, while the gestures were perfect.

One after another of the cast stepped on and off whenever they had any conversation or "business" with her, but not once was she uncertain or weak in her lines. She was what they term in stage parlance "dead letter perfect."

It was soon Ed Gordon's turn to come upon the scene, for he played the opposite part, and the most of his scenes were with her. For a moment others besides Vera held their breath as he entered, for every member of the company had heard of his infatuation. Gordon had avoided Marion carefully since that episode in the dressing-room, but at last he was obliged to come forward and face her.

Not a line of the young girl's face changed as he dashed out upon the stage. She was so imbued with the spirit of her part that she almost forgot his identity.

Gordon's face was flushed and his lips were drawn tightly, but he forced himself to be calm, and soon both were acting superbly together. Vera bit her lips and grew more and more furious, especially as she caught sight of Mr. Temple standing with the stage manager, and saw that both their faces were beaming with satisfaction.

If there had been any sneers among the company when they heard of Marion's engagement for the part, they promptly vanished as the rehearsal progressed. Lemadrid had never spoken the lines with such feeling, or with such musical cadence, and as for beauty of face and figure, she was eclipsed entirely.

At the end of every scene Marion was heartily applauded by the company, even Vera Villette clapping her hands and smiling faintly, while she ground her white teeth in anger.

For every look at Ed Gordon's face had increased her jealousy. He gazed at Marion rapturously, in spite of the distrust which he had been forced to feel for her.

"He loves her! He loves her!" the Spanish girl kept muttering to herself. "Oh, I will have my revenge! I will humiliate him and punish her!"

But it was the final "curtain" of the play that unbridled Vera's rage, for in that scene Ed Gordon, the man she loved, had to kneel at Marion's feet, and in the most endearing terms swear to her eternal love and allegiance. Gordon did it so magnificently that every member of the company stood spell-bound. If the words had come straight from his heart they could not have been more tender.

As for Marion, she stood like a queen, looking down upon him.

There was a light in her eyes and a smile upon her lips. No rational person could have looked upon this scene and doubted her love for this man, and as for Vera, every word cut deep into her heart and aroused every feeling of hate in her jealous nature.

Almost livid with rage, she dashed up the stairs to her dressing-room, and, locking the door behind her, gave full vent to her anger.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### A SUPPER AT "RITA'S."

Marion Marlowe was behind the scenes again at the evening performance, for the stage manager had told her to hold herself in readiness, for Lemadrid was in such a state, both mentally and physically, that she might collapse at any minute.

Marion's costumes had been prepared and placed in the dressing-room with Miss Ellis's, and soon the two girls were chatting on pleasant terms with each other.

Miss Ellis was a good girl, but an incessant talker, and her greatest delight seemed to be in telling the gossip of the theatre.

She began on Marion the moment she arrived, for she seemed bubbling over with news on this particular occasion.

"They say Lemadrid is completely upset," she began, with great amusement; "Mr. Temple has told her to mind her own affairs in the future, and he'll engage exactly whom he pleases, and flirt with them or not, just as suits his notion. The squabble with him has broken her all up. I guess it's doubtful if she pulls through this evening."

Marion was dressing in order to be ready if she was needed, and as she did not reply, Miss Ellis went right on talking.

"Vera Villette took it splendidly, didn't she, Miss Marlowe? You see, she always hankered to be Lemadrid's understudy, but she's too short, and not pretty enough; still she isn't even jealous! As for me, I think you are lovely in the part, Miss Marlowe! You and Ed Gordon are just matched—you make a lovely couple—and, oh, say, is it true that he is really in love with you?"

Marion burst out laughing. The idea was

amusing. Still, she could not help thinking herself that Gordon's love-making seemed very genuine.

"Nonsense, Miss Ellis! That is merely gossip!" she said, sweetly. "Pray, don't ever repeat such a ridiculous thing! Why, Miss Villette and Mr. Gordon are acknowledged sweethearts."

"Well, I'm sorry for Gordon, then," said Miss Ellis, bluntly. "Vera's a jealous creature, where a man is concerned, but I do really think she has treated you beautifully!"

"Why shouldn't she?" asked Marion, in surprise. "Miss Villette and I are friends, and besides we are fellow boarders and fellow workers."

"Oh, I guess there's no reason," said the girl, indifferently, "only some actresses would be mad to have a new arrival put over them, and I know that Vera always wanted that part, Miss Marlowe."

Marion said nothing more, but she began to feel sorry for Vera.

She had really behaved very sweetly if this was true, and Marion felt sorry to have even innocently deprived her of the coveted position.

Miss Lemadrid finished out the evening, in spite of her cold, so there was nothing for Marion to do but stand in the wings and watch proceedings. By accident she missed seeing Ned Hale in the first act; in his dual rôle as king's courtier she did not know him. When the girls were ready for the street Vera and Nona joined Marion. Vera was a trifle pale, but as smiling as ever.

The three hurried away from the others and were soon on the street, and then Marion learned that there was a surprise in store for her.

"Now, Miss Marlowe," began Vera, in her most winning way, "we want you to join us in a little lark! Nothing serious, I assure you, and only we three girls alone. We are going to indulge in a little supper."

"Where?" asked Marion, sweetly, for she had no reason for refusing. "Not at Mrs. Denison's, I hope, for the good lady very justly objects to your midnight lobsters."

"Oh, dear, no! We won't bother the poor old soul to-night! We are going to 'Rita's.' You have heard of Rita's, haven't you, Miss Marlowe?"

Marion shook her head, exactly as Vera expected. She had never heard of such a place as "Rita's."

"Is it a restaurant?" she asked, pleasantly, "if it is I shall be glad to go, for I confess that I have caught the spirit of the occasion, and am both hungry and thirsty."

"Champagne or beer?" asked Nona, laughing.

"Oh, coffee or cold milk will do for me," answered Marion. "I never drank anything stronger in my life. I'm what you call a teetotaler."

"Well, you've missed a whole lot," said Nona, as she pinched Vera, slyly. "A little champagne isn't going to hurt you any, but I always take beer because it is cheaper."

"But you haven't told me what this place is," said Marion, a little anxiously. "Of course I know it's all right, or you girls wouldn't go there, but the name is so funny that I am a little curious."

"Oh, Rita used to be one of us," explained Vera, promptly. "She was an actress who couldn't seem to act a little bit, so she very wisely left the stage and started a sort of restaurant. She's a friend to everybody in the profession—who hasn't her ill-will," she added, laughing; "but, sad to relate, their name is legion."

"And Lemadrid is one of them, I'm thinking," said Nona, thoughtfully. "Why, our star lost her diamonds a month ago during an evening at Rita's, and what do you suppose Rita said? That Lemadrid had faked the whole story as an advertising scheme, when every blessed one of us knew that she really and truly lost them!"

"I don't believe I shall care to go there," said Marion, a little dubiously. "Not that I have any diamonds to lose, but that story sounds suspicious."

Vera looked at her sharply from under her drooping lids.

"You have a bit of detective instinct, haven't you, Miss Marlowe?" she asked, softly.

A trace of a smile crossed the young girl's face, but she only replied as modestly as ever:

"It has been my good fortune to ferret out a few mysteries," she said, simply; "still I lay no claim to the detective instinct."

"Well, here we are at Rita's," cried Nona, as they turned a corner into a side street. "And now for a broiled lobster, cooked on a regular stove, and something to go with it, besides crackers and pickles!"

Marion glanced toward the house, which seemed to be only a private residence, but the first floor was brilliantly lighted, and there was an enormous transparency with the name "Rita's" in colored lights, just over the entrance.

Just before they reached the steps Vera stopped and turned suddenly. Her companions turned also, for they thought she had dropped something, but the ruse was merely to gain a moment's time. Ned Hale was just running up the steps, and she did not want Marion to see him. The next moment they

stood before the inviting entrance from which emanated sounds of merry laughter. If Marion Marlowe had dreamed of what awaited her in that house, no power on earth could have dragged her within its portals, but the Spanish girl's smile hid the blackness of her heart and her honeyed words completely concealed her treacherous motive.

Up to this point she had cleverly succeeded in her plan. What now remained to be done was to induce Marion to enter the house and to be seen there alone with Ned Hale by Ed Gordon and Mr. Temple.

Five minutes later they were seated in a cosy dining-room on one of the upper floors. The apartment was so beautifully decorated and so lavishly furnished that the country girl's eyes dilated with astonishment.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE CLIMAX OF THE PLOT.

Almost before the supper was served Vera excused herself for a minute, but Nona Nelson went on talking so pleasantly that Marion mistrusted nothing.

Some wine had been brought in, but Marion refused it politely, but her order for cold milk was delayed considerably.

Vera came back while she was drinking it and gave a sly wink at Nona. A moment later the supper was served, and the girls began their banquet in the jolliest possible manner.

Suddenly, without any warning, Marion Marlowe put her hand to her head.

"Oh, girls, I feel so dizzy and so queer," she said, stupidly. "It must be the air of the room; it is making me sleepy."

Nona Nelson sprang up excitedly, and rushed from the room just as Marion's head sank down upon the table. In an instant Vera Villette was at the drugged girl's side. There was a vindictive gleam in her eyes as she watched her pass slowly to unconsciousness.

As Marion's eyes closed at last, there was a light step outside of the door, then the face of Ned Hale protruded into the apartment.

"It's all right! She has fainted! Couldn't be better," muttered the Spanish girl, who had too much shrewdness to even admit to him that she had drugged the girl. She was glaring at Marion with her evil eyes and at the same time trying to smile sweetly upon her accomplice.

"I'd stick a knife in her heart this minute, if I dared," she thought, but out loud she only said:

"Now play your part, Ned. I must make believe I don't know you are in here. Nona has gone for Gordon and Temple, and they'll both be here in a minute."

She started to leave the room, but the burly fellow caught her.

"Not so fast, Vera," he said, in a low, vibrating voice. "If I do this for you, what is my reward, little tartar?"

"Oh, don't talk about it now! Another time, Ned! Time is precious just now, and we mustn't waste it!"

She tried to pull away from him, but he held her fast. There was a look in his eyes that showed that he understood her.

"You must give me a kiss and a promise, Vera," he muttered. "I take my oath I will not release you without it!"

"You are a brute!" hissed the girl, between her white teeth. "Do your work first, Ned, and claim your reward after."

The fellow threw his head back with a curious chuckle.

"Try that with some one else, you little she-devil!" he whispered. "I know just how much reward I would get! You'd laugh at my efforts as you have at my love and my money!"

"Nonsense! I have given you my promise," whispered the Spanish girl, quickly.

"Which amounts to that," said the man, snapping his fingers.

He had one arm around her waist and was holding her two wrists with one of his large, strong hands.

Time was passing. Gordon and Temple might appear at any second.

The Spanish girl bit her lips, but she was forced to yield to him.

"Take your kisses, then," she whispered, hoarsely, closing her eyes and throwing back her head, "and, as for my promise, I will fulfill it before this time to-morrow!"

The man pressed his lips to her in a feverish caress, then he released her and almost threw her away from him.

The moment she was free Vera darted from the room. This was what she wanted —to leave the unprincipled fellow alone with Marion.

The moment she was gone, Ned Hale turned towards Marion. She was still half lying in her chair, her head resting heavily upon the table.

As easily as though she were a baby the fellow raised her from the chair, and, carrying her across the floor, laid her carefully upon the sofa.

The beautiful face was as pale as death, and as Hale stared down at it he felt a thrill creep over his body.

For an instant he thought that the girl was dead, and yet he felt sure that she had only been drugged by some powerful nar-

cotic, for Vera's words or manner had in no wise deceived him.

He bent lower over the fair face and listened to her breathing. She was helpless—she was beautiful—yet he stood silently staring down upon her. Suddenly a thought of Vera Villette flashed over his brain. Compared with the sweet face before him, the Spanish girl's dark face seemed as ugly as a demon's.

He began loathing himself for consenting to this thing. He wondered if it was too late to save her now from being discovered, or had Rita done her part in the dastardly proceeding?

He glanced at the door, expecting to see Ed Gordon's face appear, but as yet he was undisturbed. Rita was giving him far more time than he needed.

Another glance at Marion's face concluded his reflections.

He was a fiend and a knave! A rascal and a coward!

Just once more he bent over to listen to Marion's breathing, and for the space of a second he was tempted to kiss her.

Then the memory of Vera Villette's kisses came surging through his brain. He turned on his heel like a madman and rushed from the apartment.

But that last act of bending over the unconscious girl had been fatal to his resolution, for not only Ed Gordon, but Mr. Temple had witnessed it from the door, which Rita had opened so cautiously that Hale had not even heard it.

Vera Villett's plan had been carried to its climax. Marion's fair name was tarnished. It remained to be seen how deeply she was injured.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE TRIUMPH.

When the rehearsal was called the next day Marion Marlowe was not there, nor had she been seen at Mrs. Denison's boarding-house since leaving it the evening previous.

Vera Villette was excited and ill at ease, and made so many blunders that the stage manager exhausted his full vocabulary of epithets upon her.

The one topic of conversation behind the scenes was Miss Marlowe's disappearance, and it was soon plain that the whole company knew that she was last seen at "Rita's."

Sneers and vulgar remarks followed this announcement, especially when it was learned that Ned Hale had been her companion.

To be seen at "Rita's" was in itself a disgrace, but to be lost for twenty-four hours in the oblivion which her house afforded was enough to ruin any one's reputation.

Ned Hale himself was absent from the rehearsal, and this significant fact was commented upon freely.

No one but Vera and Nona knew how the young girl had been lured to the place where she had last been seen, or how absolutely innocent she was in the matter.

Neither Mr. Gordon nor his manager had anything to say. They were both sullen and seemingly under restraint with each other.

At the very last scene Miss Lemadrid collapsed. A doctor was summoned, and she was ordered to stop work immediately. Then followed hours of anxiety for Mr. Temple.

Marion Marlowe was his sole dependence. Without her there would be no performance. An hour later, if any one could have seen him, they would have noticed a change in his face. From feeling vexed and anxious, he suddenly became almost hilarious.

Not a member of the company expected a performance that evening, but when they arrived at the theatre they found it lighted as usual.

Furthermore, Marion Marlowe was in Miss Lemadrid's dressing-room getting ready for her rôle as the "star" performer of the evening.

She was deathly pale and painfully reserved, but she conducted herself just as charmingly as ever.

If she knew the truth of Vera's treachery, she did not reveal it, but prepared for the evening in her customary quiet manner.

There were sneers and slurs cast at her from every direction; even Ed Gordon's hasty glances showed the scorn that he felt for her.

Just once during the first act Marion lost her self-possession, but it was over in an instant, not a soul had noticed it.

She had suddenly come face to face with Ned Hale in his workman's costume, and a shudder passed over her, for it was the last proof of her suspicions against Vera.

The young girl was never more beautiful in her life, and her appearance before the footlights fairly electrified the audience.

Before the evening was over she had won a magnificent victory. There was curtain call after curtain call, and the applause at the finish was spontaneous and lasting.

Even Ed Gordon had held his breath before her impassioned utterances, but, catching the fire of her spirit, he responded nobly. Through her he, too, had achieved a victory, it would have been impossible to have stumbled in the path of such a meteor.

Yet at the close of the performance Marion

found herself alone. Not a member of the company came forward to congratulate her. Whoever had poisoned their minds against her had done so, effectually, and Marion knew to her satisfaction that this person was Vera.

The tears sprang to her eyes, but she held her head proudly. They should not see how deeply she suffered—and, then, she had triumphed. This thought was cheering; she tried to let it console her.

The watchman was lowering the lights when a shriek sounded from one of the dressing-rooms. It was Vera's, and in an instant every member of the company had gathered around the door.

Another and another shriek followed, then some one burst in the door. A strange sight was revealed.

Vera Villette, clad only in her stage gown of flimsy white lace, was crouching in a corner, with both wrists bleeding, while Ned Hale, also hacked and bleeding about the face and hands, knelt beside a trunk, scribbling something on a bit of paper.

For a moment not a sound could be heard in the room, then Hale fell to the floor with a groan, the pencil dropping from his fingers.

After that all was confusion. Marion fled to her dressing-room, and did not emerge again until she heard Mr. Temple calling to her. As she opened the door a score of faces confronted her. They were not sneering now, but were all turned towards her, admiringly.

Mr. Temple held in his hand a bit of blood-stained paper. It was Ned Hale's confession. He read it aloud to them.

All the rest seemed like a dream to Marion. The women crowded around and kissed and hugged her, while the men, headed by Ed Gordon, bowed respectfully and shook hands with her.

Hale had scribbled a hasty admission of his own and Vera's guilt, but he had added nothing about their fatal quarrel.

While the company was still discussing the outrage, the young girl escaped to the stage door, where she knew Mr. Ray was awaiting her with a carriage.

Vera Villette was dead before the morning of the next day, but Hale was taken to a hospital, and finally recovered. He was tried for murder, but acquitted of the charge, and after that neither New York nor the stage ever heard of him again.

Miss Lemadrid withdrew from the company, and so did Nona, but Marion Marlowe enjoyed many a magnificent triumph, although she did not fulfill a tenth part of her engagement.

Ed Gordon was so humiliated by his injustice to the brave girl that he was forced to stifle the love in his heart and bear in silence his own just penance.

Marion never explained to the company how she was rescued from Rita's, but to her friends she said that Ned Hale had done it. He ordered a carriage as soon as she revived, and had her driven straight to the home of her sister, Dollie.

There was no charge made against Rita for her share in the vile plot, but only a little later a similar occurrence took place in her house, with such serious results that the woman was forced to flee from the city.

Thus ended a bitter experience for Marion, but in the end, as usual, she triumphed gloriously.

THE END.

Although Marion Marlowe's success as an actress was now assured, she was destined soon to pass through some experiences that required all the pluck and daring she possessed. In the next number of MY QUEEN (No. 11) will appear the story of "Marion Marlowe's Disappearance; or, Almost a Crime," in which the young actress is lost to her friends through the machinations of a new enemy. Her confinement and her final escape, single-handed, by throwing herself into the river, form some of the incidents of a story no reader of MY QUEEN can afford to miss.

# PATTERN COLUMN.

By special arrangements with the manufacturers we are enabled to supply the readers of MY QUEEN with the patterns of all garments described or illustrated in this column at TEN CENTS each. Address, "Pattern Column," MY QUEEN, 238 William Street, New York City.

☞ *In ordering patterns be sure to give size and number.*

## No. 2366—LADY'S FIVE-GORED SKIRT.

(Having a double inverted pleat at the back, giving the fan effect.)

This skirt has front, side and back gores. The lining should be cut the same shape as the outside material, and the lower edge interlined with canvas or haircloth about five inches deep. Cheviot, serge, homespun, Oxford suitings and silk would develop this model well. The pattern is cut in sizes 22 to 34 inches waist measure. Size 24 requires seven yards of 21-inch or three yards of 54-inch material, and measures about three and three-quarters yards at the lower edge.

# QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

## BY GRACE SHIRLEY

NOTE.—This department is a special feature of this publication, and it will be appreciated, we feel sure, by all our readers. It is conducted by Miss Shirley, whose remarkable ability to answer all questions, no matter how delicate the import, has become well known. Readers of "MY QUEEN" need not hesitate to write her on any subject. Miss Shirley will have their interests at heart and will never refuse her assistance or sympathy. STREET & SMITH.

"I saw in the correspondence column of 'My Queen' that you gave the girls good advice, and thought perhaps you would help me in my trouble. I am a young man of eighteen, and have been going with a girl that can catch any man she wants to, she has such a winning way about her. We have been going together about seven months, and I love her and told her so, and she said my love was returned. Of late she has seemed awfully cold towards me, and used me mean. There is another girl that she is jealous of, but I never gave her any cause to be so. Do you think jealousy is the reason she is so cold towards me, and goes with other fellows? I have worried so much that I have lost twenty pounds.

"HARVEY D."

We are very glad to hear from you, as we are from any of our young men readers. As far as we can judge, the young lady is inclined to be fickle. If she is cold to you and goes out with other men, it is fair proof that her interest in you has declined. If she was jealous of you she would probably try to monopolize you and keep you away from the other girls. Since she enjoys other men's society more than yours we would advise you to let her go and not waste any time in worrying or losing any flesh over it. You are young enough to find lots of other girls quite as attractive, and if you did not become attached to any one woman for ten years it would be the best thing that could happen to you.

"I am a young girl of eighteen and would like a little advice. On several occasions I went to the park and met a young man who won my affections, and I am most certain he dearly loves me. He has asked me to be his wife. Would it be advisable to make inquiries concerning his family, also how soon would you advise marriage?

"MARGARET C."

Inasmuch as your acquaintance with this young man was begun in an unconventional manner, it would be advisable for you to learn as much as you can about him. Find out how he stands mentally, morally, socially and financially among his acquaintances. If the result is satisfactory, we would advise you to wait a year before marrying. This will give you both ample time to test the sincerity of your affections.

"I write to you for a little advice. I am a young man, twenty-six years old, and I have been married only a few months, and my wife has left me. She is young, being seventeen years old, and she had no excuse for leaving only that I was too old for her. She loves me, but some one has put her up to go. Now you, being of the female sex, I write you for advice. What would you do if you were in my place? Please answer in your new book, 'My Queen.' I do not approve of divorce.

FRANK B. R."

Your letter is a sad one, and we hasten to reply. Considering her youth, we are not very much surprised at your wife's peculiar actions. We presume she has "gone home to mamma," where she ought to have stayed for several years longer before she married you. No girl of seventeen is fit to become a wife. Her nature and sentiments are not sufficiently developed. Try and win your wife back by kindness and courtesy, and when she is once more under your roof, endeavor to make her so happy that she will never care to leave you. We are sure that you can do this if you try, and certainly no effort can be more praiseworthy and noble.

RUTH AND DORETTA.—We regret that you do not allow us to publish your letter. You must remember that others will be as much interested in reading your questions as you are in reading theirs. If your parents do not object to your meeting the young men, we can see no reason why you should not make their acquaintance. Your father would be the proper person to invite the young men, and he can easily determine upon short acquaintance whether or not they are suitable companions for you. We should judge by what you say of them that they are very manly young fellows.

"I have no mother to advise me, so I come to you. Will you kindly advise me through the correspondence pages of 'My Queen?'

"Three years ago, when I was twenty, I broke my engagement with a young man to whom I had given the one love of my life. He told me I was the only girl he ever wanted to marry, and that he could love but once, as that was his disposition. Another young man led him from me,

for he had no mind of his own, and that was why we parted. He was sorry afterwards and tried in various ways and a number of times to 'make up,' but I cut him, for I did not feel that I could trust him, though I love him still.

"Recently he has commenced speaking to me and putting himself out of his way to do so, and putting himself in my way at every opportunity, always lifting his hat and smiling and saying very sweetly, 'Good-evening, Beth.' I have thought he did it with an object, and I have encouraged him all I can, but he doesn't seem to know I mean it so. Still he keeps crossing my path and does not make any effort to talk or walk with me. I know I don't imagine all this, for I know him and I have watched him closely. What do you think he means?

"He goes around with different girls, but doesn't seem to care particularly for their society, only pastime. But I hear he always has a good word for me, and is displeased when I go out with any one. Do you think I can win him back? And how? Or ought I not to try? I can never care for any one as I do him, and I would like to have him back. You will greatly oblige me by kindly giving an answer as soon as possible. ANXIOUS BETH."

We think you are taking great risks in renewing the friendship of a man who "has no mind of his own," but perhaps you think this experience has taught the young man a lesson. The only love worth having is the love that can be put to the test and yet remain constant. Perhaps a little apparent indifference on your part will force him to take more decided action. If he does not come back of his own accord his love would hardly be worth having.

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"I became interested in 'My Queen' and also in the questions and answers published in same; will you answer a question of mine? I formed a friendship with a girl friend three years ago and she returned same. We were neighbors, and our parents were old friends, and we often spoke of love. Her parents removed to a distant place, but not until after my friend had gone did I realize that I loved her. Here is where my misfortune lies—she seems to have drifted apart from me. I have written since, but after a while her friendship grew cold, but my love was still just as intense. We are both of the same age, twenty-six years, and unmarried. Can you solve the mystery for me and relieve my aching heart?

"SILENT LOVE."

We are very pleased indeed to offer you our advice. Why not write the young lady a plain, candid statement of your feelings and abide by the answer which you receive from her? The knowledge of your affection may awaken a kindred feeling in her breast, and, at any rate, you will be relieved of all suspense in the matter. We trust that the young lady is not so indifferent as she seems.

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"I am struggling between duty and honor vs. love, and write for advice.

"I am a wife and mother. I did not love the man I married, but rather than ruin his life I sacrificed myself, as I thoughtlessly had encouraged him. I did and still love another, who returns my love. I am not happy as I am, but could be with the man of my choice. What am I to do? Go on making a martyr of myself, or obtain legal separation and marry my ideal?

"UNHAPPY WOMAN."

You have indeed made a sad mistake in marrying a man whom you did not love, and the question of leaving him must lie with your own conscience. Are you sure that you cannot cultivate a true affection for your husband? Put the other man out of your thoughts, and try earnestly to love the man whom you have married, and after you have made this experiment, let us hear from you again.

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"For over a year I have been cherishing the idea that one of my friends cared a great deal for me, and I have been hoping that some day he would declare his love. Last night he told me that he was in love with my sister, who is two years younger than I am, and I am simply miserable. I am not sure that she cares for him, and I do want him so badly myself that I would like to know if there is not some way in which I can win his affection. Please advise me, for I am awfully distressed. CARRIE L."

We would advise you not to try to win his affection away from your sister, but to smile bravely and let him go where he wishes. Love cannot be driven or directed. It goes where it will, and no amount of coaxing has ever influenced the darts of Cupid. We are deeply sorry for you, for there are few more bitter things in this world than the pangs of misplaced affection. You certainly do not want love that does not come to you gladly and willingly, for it will not be true love, and will not be worth having. Keep up a brave heart and live down your sorrow. Cultivate the acquaintance of other men and endeavor to find solace in their companionship. It will not be easy, but you will be a better, finer woman when you have conquered.

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"For some time I have been indulging in a secret correspondence with a young man, as my parents object to my receiving letters from men or allowing them to call upon me. I have also met him frequently, and we have enjoyed each other's society greatly. Now the friend who has helped me out in all this says that she thinks it is wrong, and refuses to let us send any more letters through her. What would you do if you were me? I cannot bear the thought of not seeing him or hearing from him. I know he would marry me if I suggested it. I am sixteen years old, do you think I am too young to marry?

"MILLIE V. R."

Your friend's conscience seems to have awakened rather late in the day, but we think she is quite right. A girl of your age should not think of marriage for several years, nor should she indulge in secret correspondence or clandestine meetings. Forbidden fruit always seems a great deal sweeter than it really is. If this young man really cares for you, there is only one way for him to show it, and that is for him to go to your parents in a straightforward, manly way and request to be allowed to call upon you. They are

much better judges of what is good for you than you are, and, if they object to his seeing you, we advise you to give him up and wait until you are a few years older before you plunge again into affairs of the heart.

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"I made the acquaintance of a young man at the seashore last summer, and yesterday he proposed to me and I accepted him. Now, while I have a deep affection for him, I really do not know anything about his family or standing or character. Would it be improper for me to make inquiries about these things? I am all alone in the world, so I ask you for your advice.

"BESSIE C. R."

You would be quite right to make the inquiries you suggest. Some of the most engaging and apparently lovable men we have met were born rascals. No woman should tie herelf to a man for life unless she is sure that he is worthy of her. Find out all you can about your lover's position in business and in social circles, whether his past record is clean, and whether his habits are such that you can be sure that your married life will be a happy one. We do not believe that the question of family is a very important one, as you are marrying him and not his relatives, but it may be important if there is a possibility of your residing with them or they with you. All these questions should be decided to your satisfaction before there is any formal announcement of the engagement. Then if you should be obliged to break it off because your lover proved to be undesirable in any way there would be no chance for idle gossip regarding it.

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"I am engaged to one of the best fellows in the world, big-hearted, generous and kindly, and I love him dearly. He has one bad habit that worries me dreadfully. Once in a while he will drink too much. He never means to, and he is always repentant afterward, and I know he tries hard not to drink, but he gets out with other men and they persuade him. I would like to help him to break away from this vice, but I don't know how to go about it. Won't you please let me know of some way to cure him. MAGGIE C."

Your lover does not seem to be vicious, but only easily led. Talk the matter over with him and show him how he is injuring you as well as himself. Show him how every dollar spent for liquor postpones your wedding day just so much more. Ask him if you are not worth more to him than the companionship of his drinking friends. If your persuasions are not of more weight with him than theirs, you may be sure he does not love you as much as he does the wine glass. Under no circumstances marry him until he has given up the habit entirely and for a long time. If he can be cured of the vice at all, your pleadings and your refusal to wed him will effect it.

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"There is a young man who is making love to me, and he writes me the strangest letters. He calls me his 'queen,' and talks about my 'starry eyes,' 'pearly teeth,' 'coral ears,' 'velvet lips' and all that sort of thing. Do you suppose he really means it or is he just trying to make an impression on me? Please let me know, for I don't know what to think of him. DIANA B. R."

A young woman with stars for eyes, pearls for teeth, coral for ears and a mouth made of velvet would be a curiosity for a dime museum. No—we don't think the young man means it—if he did he would be a fit candidate for a lunatic asylum. Probably he is trying to impress you with the idea that he thinks you are perfect, but has not sense enough to put his thoughts into plain English.

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"For three years I have been deeply attached to a young man nearly ten years my junior. I do not look my thirty summers, and am frequently taken for twenty-five, while he is old in his manners, and no one would guess that he was just past twenty-one. Now he wants me to marry him, and I am half inclined to do so, but am afraid that the difference in our ages might lead to unhappiness. Do you think that he would be happy with a wife so much older than himself?

"ROSE M."

You are wise to consider this matter very carefully before you marry. While you may be very attractive now you must remember that you will grow old much faster than he will. When you are past middle age he will be just in the prime of life. Whether the charm of your companionship will then be a tie strong enough to hold him is a serious question. Few men of twenty-one really know their own minds. If there is nothing to be gained by marriage, why not continue as you are and wait for a few years until you are sure that his affection is steadfast. "Age has beauty for age, but gay youth loves gay youth." We would advise you to delay the matter for the present and let it work out its own course. The young man may find that the society of those nearer his own age is more agreeable, and then you will be glad that you had not tied him fast to yourself.

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"I am in deep trouble and have no one to whom I can turn for advice. All my life I have been a 'flirt.' There has never been any man that I cared a snap of my finger for, and I have treated them all frivolously—so frivolously that I have not retained a single man friend. Now I have formed a deep affection for a man I met recently, but I am afraid he has heard how badly I have treated other men, for he treats me very coldly, and I cannot seem to gain his attention for a moment. What can I do to redeem my reputation and convince him that I am in earnest this time? "LIZZIE K. H."

You have made a sorry mistake, indeed. For a girl to forget her womanhood and play with men is a grievous error. No one can retain a man's respect unless she retains her self-respect. You are now being repaid in your own coin for the pain you have caused others. If you are really sincere in your repentance and are positive that you have a deep affection for this man,

# STOP! My Sisters

***and consider the all-important***

## Fact

***that in addressing Mrs. Pinkham you are confiding your private ills to a woman—a woman whose experience in treating woman's diseases is greater than that of any living person, male or female.***

You can talk freely to a woman when it is revolting to relate your private troubles to a man ; besides, a man does not understand, simply because he is a man.

Every one will agree that there are the strongest of all reasons why, if we are ill, we should appeal to the person who knows the most about the kind of illness with which we are afflicted—one who has had the greatest experience in treating just such cases and meeting just the symptoms that are manifest in our particular case.

What confidence does one gain by consulting one who has occasionally met a case just like ours, but has had no great experience? None whatever. All treatment under such a person must of necessity be experimental. As a matter of fact, in the treatment of female ills Mrs. Pinkham has had more experience than any one person in the world. For a period of over twenty-five years women have been constantly in correspondence and consultation with her; and it is safe to say there is not a case or complication of female derangements with which she is not familiar, and it is a positive fact, easily verified, that within the last few months she, with her corps of trained women assistants, have treated over one hundred thousand cases, and that more than a million women of this country owe the restoration of their health to her advice and Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound.

Now, if a woman is ill and miserable, it seems to us only simple justice to herself that she should avail herself of the help of a woman of such enormous experience.

## MRS. PINKHAM'S STANDING INVITATION.

Women suffering from any form of female weakness are invited to promptly communicate with Mrs. Pinkham, at Lynn, Mass. She asks nothing in return, except their good will, and her advice has relieved thousands. Surely any woman, rich or poor, is very foolish if she does not take advantage of this generous offer of assistance.

If you are influenced by the advertising of Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound, and the testimonials published in favor of it, and go to a store to buy it, do not allow a clerk in a drug store to induce you to buy something about which you know nothing—only what he tells you. His reason for wishing you to buy the medicine is because he can make more money on it. He does not care a fig about your getting well, only to make his sale. Remember that

## Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound

***has absolutely cured more cases of female ills than any other one medicine in the world.***